

Charting a *Blue* Path: Bangladesh's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century

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Introducing the Issue

- Bangladesh is traditionally seen as a 'small state'
- The decolonization of Afro-Asian countries led to the conceptualization of this concept—the Cold War solidified this understanding
- While we cannot overlook the geographical limitations—Bangladesh's identity has shifted to a new terrain overcoming its 'small state' identity
- Several factors led to this transformation—Bangladesh's embracing a 'blue' path is the strongest of those

What is Blue Economy

- Much has already been said about this
- A new path to development—transition from brown to green to blue economy
- Specifically applied for coastal regions
- Gunter Pauli (1994) introduced this concept that would involve ocean resources for ensuring sustainable development

What is Blue Economy

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Key Areas

- a)** sustainable use of biodiversity
- b)** food security,
- c)** unsustainable fisheries,
- d)** climate change and managing carbon budgets,
- e)** marine and coastal tourism, pollution and marine debris, and
- f)** governance and international cooperation

Opportunities and Challenges

- a)** shipping and port facilities,
- b)** fisheries,
- c)** tourism,
- d)** aquaculture,
- e)** energy,
- f)** biotechnology, and
- g)** submarine mining

Connection between Blue Economy and Foreign Policy

- Since the concept of BE is advanced, development planners are enthusiastic to enhance ocean-based resources
- Many have not seen or studied systematically the connection between this particular type of development and foreign policy goals of a country
- A number of activities arranged around highlighting probable gains from BE; but these overlook foreign policy and identity issues that may provide a leverage to a country
- For Bangladesh, this is particularly true

Suffering from an Identity Crisis

- A small country with no future
- No foreign policy independence due to its particular location—locational reality
- Aid dependence
- Staggering economy
- But the Bangladesh of 1971 and the Bangladesh of 2018 have drastically changed...

These are the world's fastest growing economies

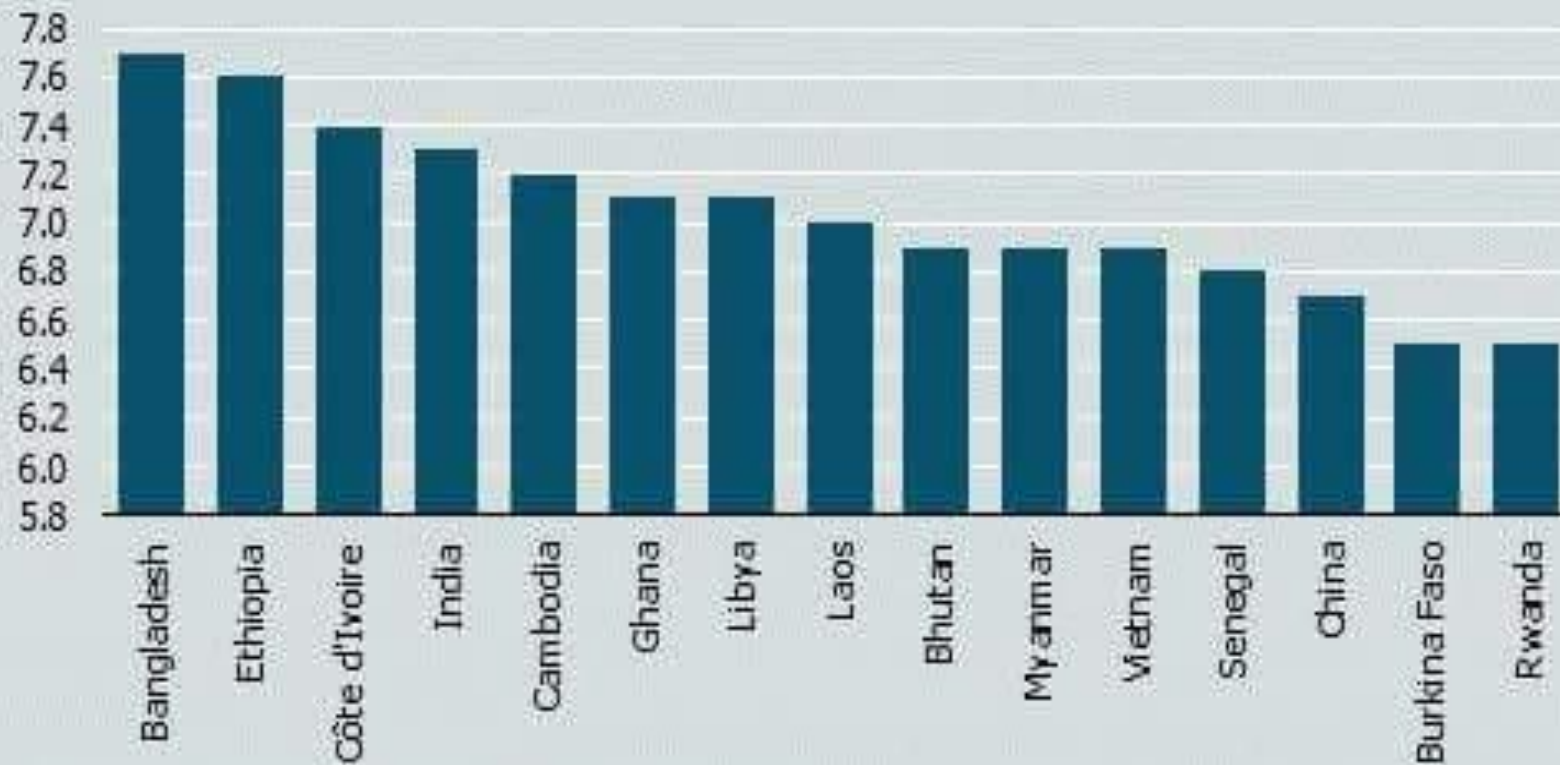
Projected percentage real GDP growth, 2016



Source: IMF World Economic Outlook April 2016

World's fastest growing economies, 2018

(real GDP; % change, year on year)



Note: July 2018 forecasts. Source: Economist Intelligence Unit.

Things are Changing for Bangladesh...

- Bangladesh is experiencing changes in last several years in a massive scale
- What does it owe to?
- Despite being geographically disadvantageous, Bangladesh has found its 'third neighbor' with an abundance of resources that have remained hitherto unexplored
- The Bay of Bengal, our southern neighbor, has opened up a new vista of opportunities for Bangladesh

Blue Economy and the Bay of Bengal

- A particular area has strong connections between BE and foreign policy of Bangladesh
 - ❑ Shipping and port facilities
- These are the areas that need not only expertise in technical areas but also diplomatic efforts to consolidate Bangladesh's international position

Shipping and Port Facilities

- ▶ **Building of infrastructure for its own development**
- ▶ **Providing facilities to landlocked South Asian countries**
- ▶ **Connecting South, Southeast and East Asia together—
Indo-Pacific Corridor**

Shipping and Port Facilities

Geographical location of Ports in the region



Shipping and Port Facilities

- Bangladesh has inherited both of its ports since its independence
- Developing infrastructure is the order of the day in today's globalized world
- It has aimed to construct a deep sea port (DSP) at Matarbari
- Sonadia project is officially cancelled although some hope that it is not off completely
- Shipping and port facilities are supplemented by land-based connectivity as well

Implications of BE on Bangladesh's Foreign Policy

- ▶ Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina
- ▶ “Blue Economy is a concept that can significantly contribute to the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. Blue economy concept has ushered in a new horizon for economic development of the coastal countries through utilizing the sea and marine resources at national and international level.”

Implications of BE on Bangladesh's Foreign Policy

- **The US Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Tom Kelly (2014)**
- **“In a broader perspective US values Bangladesh's geographical location. It sees an important role for Bangladesh in the overall security context of the Middle East, and Indian-Pacific-Oceans region. This is why US wants Bangladesh by its side in its strategic pursuits.”**

Implications of BE on Bangladesh's Foreign Policy

- The connection between foreign policy and advancing BE goals and objectives are strong
- A number of countries are now seeing Bangladesh as the lynchpin of economic hub connecting inter-Asian states
- This is being possible due to offering Bangladesh's geographic location and functional appeal to the rest of the world
- We are talking about infrastructure building but who would avail this and why—that is a question that needs to be woven with the greater BE policy